

Home Builder/Developer: Hawkins, Edward B.
Birth/Death Dates: 1902-1991
Practice Dates: 1942-1967
Firms: Construction Products Company
Colorado Metal Products
General Investments Company
Hawkins Associates

Biographical Information

Edward B. Hawkins was born in 1902 in Denver, Colorado, graduated from the city's East High School, and went on to study civil engineering for two years at Colorado State Agricultural College, now Colorado State University, in Fort Collins. In 1924, he moved to Chicago where he entered the construction trade. He worked as a building superintendent for Home Builders of America, a firm involved in the construction of houses in LaGrange, Evanston, Wilmette, Winnetka and Skokie, Illinois. During this period, he undertook small general contracting projects. His increasing interest in residential design led him to study firsthand the Chicago area work of architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright had won international acclaim for his Prairie Style buildings in Oak Park, Illinois, where he lived and worked until 1909. By the 1920s, Wright had relocated to Los Angeles.

When the Great Depression stalled home building, Hawkins joined the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) federal relief program. With the CCC, Hawkins built roads, fireplaces and picnic areas throughout the Chicago region. In 1942, Edward and Charlotte, his wife, returned to Denver. For the duration of World War II, Hawkins served in a civilian capacity at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, a federal chemical weapons manufacturing plant.

Hawkins also began to establish himself as a home designer and builder in Denver. He constructed his first house at 14th and Niagara on a lot next to his family home and continued with homes in the 2500 to 3000 blocks of Race, Albion, Ash, Forest and Glencoe. Between 1942 and 1949, Hawkins built thirty-five individual modern homes in northeast Denver ranging in price from \$10,000 to \$23,000. He designed the houses himself, incorporating ideas about modern architecture and modern living from his work and studies in Chicago.

During this period Hawkins's firm, Construction Products Company operated a shop in Lakewood at 14th and Harlan, in an old streetcar barn. Under the supervision of shop foreman Clyde Mannon, houses were prefabricated for on-site assembly. Custom aluminum-frame windows were also manufactured for use in Hawkins' own homes and for sale to local architects and home builders.

In August of 1949, Hawkins conceived of developing an entire subdivision, signing an option to purchase a thirty-acre parcel in Englewood. In November of 1949, he completed the purchase of the property from M. Olive Hensley for \$5,250 and christened his new holdings Arapahoe Acres.

In order to promote their products in the booming new housing market, the Revere Copper and Brass Company joined with the Southwest Research Institute, part of the Housing Research Institute, to create a national program to advance "better architect-builder relations and the general improvement of the quality of speculatively built houses." The program solicited proposals featuring quality modern design, which Revere considered more cost effective and

livable than traditional residential design. Participants juried into the program would build ten or more economical, single-family homes designed by a professional architect. Local and national publicity would promote the homes, architects, home builders and Revere Copper and Brass products throughout the country.

Hawkins recognized that the Revere program could help him sell his new subdivision. However, the program included strict Federal Housing Administration (FHA) housing design guidelines that shunned modern homes with flat roofs and plain, asymmetrical facades as a fad, refusing to consider them sound, long-term investments. While traditional homes in large developments were readily financed in whole, Hawkins had already discovered that the FHA was willing to loan only 80 percent of the purchase price for one of his modern houses. By associating his new subdivision with the Revere Quality House Program, Hawkins most likely hoped to garner more favorable financing terms from the FHA.

In order to participate, Hawkins set aside his own design ambitions and hired Eugene Sternberg, who had been recommended to him by the Revere Program. Sternberg, a board-certified architect and professor at the University of Denver School of Architecture and Planning, agreed to participate because of his interest in the creation of socially conscious modern housing combining quality architectural design and economical construction.

In 1949, Sternberg's site and construction plans were submitted to the Revere Quality House Program. Upon their acceptance into the program, William C. Atkin, a San Antonio based technical advisor to the Southwest Research Institute, visited Denver to lay the groundwork for the construction and display of the initial nine homes.

Charlotte Hawkins served as business manager. Clyde Mannon, who previously worked as Hawkins' shop foreman, joined the operation at Arapahoe Acres. He assisted Hawkins with construction and directed prefabrication at the new carpentry shop constructed at 2901 South Lafayette Drive to replace the Lakewood location. Mannon, a native of Golden, Colorado, became Hawkins' partner in General Investments Company and Hawkins Associates, both corporations formed to finance and build Arapahoe Acres.

Within Arapahoe Acres, Sternberg partially abandoned the surrounding street grid. His curvilinear plan reduced automobile speed and discouraged through traffic, resulting in a safer, quieter neighborhood. On October 13, 1949, after a battle with Englewood over the ability of the fire department to locate individual houses in a neighborhood with such a radical street design, the full subdivision plan was approved and filed with Arapahoe County and the Englewood Planning and Zoning Commission. In November of 1949, Hawkins borrowed \$85,000 from Denver's Central Bank to finance the initial construction phase, mortgaging nine of the lots.

Instead of regrading and leveling the lots, common residential development practice, the natural grade, a forty-foot slope from east to west, was retained. Some houses were sited on flat lots atop high points or low expanses below. Some stepped up or down to the front, rear or side of their sites. Houses were oriented on their lots for privacy, and to take the best advantage of southern and western exposures for solar heating and mountain views. The homes were set at twenty-three to forty-five degree angles to the street behind a twenty-five foot building line. Walks and driveways were situated to create broad lawns and provide areas for landscaping in a variety of proportions and dimensions.

For Arapahoe Acres, a diverse community was envisioned for families of varying size and financial resources. Homes were grouped in price ranges from \$10,000 to over \$20,000. Lot

sizes varied from 66 x 100 feet up to 80 x 150 feet. Each home is of individual design. The initial nine homes designed by Sternberg were a single basic plan varied by individual location on the lot and by the position and character of the carport and main entrance. Each home had a paved terrace to the rear. The primary exterior materials were red or yellow brick, plywood panels and glass.

Sternberg designed the homes on a four-foot module with flowing living and work areas set off from the bedrooms for privacy. Sliding interior wall panels were based on the Japanese Shoji screen. A variety of options was offered on the roof type, the fireplaces included in every house, and the color and finish of exterior and interior walls. Interior walls were often paneled in natural hardwood plywood. Modern kitchens offered new appliances and efficient workspaces. Floors were asphalt tile. Due to the sponsorship of Revere Copper and Brass, the model home featured copper in the mechanical construction and interior finishes.

The homes were characterized by many construction innovations that Sternberg brought with him from his work in London. They included insulated cavity brick walls and the area's first warm-air heating system combining radiant floor heat with forced air heat distributed under concrete slabs to floor registers along walls. Acoustical ceilings provided noise control. Stylistically, Sternberg's work was related to the International Style.

By the time the Denver press announced the opening of the model home on Sunday, March 12, 1950, the first group of nine homes had already been sold. Despite an untimely snow storm, over 4,000 attended the opening at 2900 South Marion Street, drawn by headlines promising a modern model home with comforts normally reserved for more expensive houses. Model home admissions were donated to Laradon Hall, a Denver school for the education of disabled children. Visitors were asked to contribute to "scientific housing research" by filling out a four page survey on house design, siting, options and pricing.

With the announcement of the show home opening, Hawkins and his suppliers and subcontractors ran adjacent advertising in the *Denver Post*. Colorado Metal Products, Hawkins own window manufacturing firm, advertised the "Columbine Tubular Aluminum Casement Windows" which were installed in the show home.

Through the Revere Quality Home Program's massive publicity campaign, Arapahoe Acres appeared nationally in the architectural and construction press. In 1950, *Life* magazine featured Arapahoe Acres in "*Best Houses under \$15,000; Eight fine, mass-produced examples show buyers what they can get in low-priced homes.*"

A commendation from the Southwest Research Institute's division of housing and construction technology was noted in *Architectural Record*, which singled out Arapahoe Acres for its "quality and character." In a 1950 *Progressive Architecture* article that questioned architects nationally about their designs for speculative builder homes, Arapahoe Acres was a featured project. A 1951 *Progressive Architecture* "Case Study" mentioned Arapahoe Acres as a noteworthy development. Katherine Ford and Thomas Creighton also featured it in their book, *Quality Budget Houses*.

In the construction press, the July 1951 *Practical Builder* ran a feature article entitled "*A Sell-Out in Contemporary Architecture*" and Revere Copper and Brass ran full-page ads featuring Arapahoe Acres in national trade publications. *Better Homes and Gardens* magazine offered a complete set of Arapahoe Acres house plans for \$25.00, on which Sternberg received a commission for each set sold.

During the initial success of Arapahoe Acres, it became evident that Hawkins did not share Sternberg's interest in low-cost, affordable homes. Much to Sternberg's dismay, Hawkins sold the model home for more than the \$11,500 upon which they originally agreed. This created a rift between the two men and in 1950, Edward Hawkins and Eugene Sternberg ended their collaborative relationship. Approximately twenty homes were built on Sternberg's plans, almost all on the Marion Street frontage.

After the departure of Sternberg, Hawkins was free to fulfill his own ambitions as a designer. Virtually all of the work of Hawkins for Arapahoe Acres reflected his admiration for the Usonian Style that Frank Lloyd Wright developed in the years following the Depression. After his return from Chicago, Hawkins continued to observe Wright's work including a visit to Wright's Taliesin West in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Hawkins built homes within the original Sternberg site plan. Hawkins believed style took precedence over economy. Except for a series of small homes on South Cornell Circle, all variations on a single, simple plan, Hawkins designed unique and increasingly larger and more luxurious homes. Initially built and sold on speculation, Arapahoe Acres homes were more often designed and built by Hawkins under contract with individual home buyers.

Though early homes in Arapahoe Acres had been successfully financed by FHA/GI loans, the FHA balked as Hawkins began to build more extreme modern designs. After much discussion, his house at 2920 South Lafayette Drive received approval, but at a low valuation—only \$12,800 on a house with a sales price of \$21,000. By 1954, conventional private mortgages became the norm and with the success of the subdivision, Hawkins himself began to provide financing.

Exterior construction materials choices expanded to include natural stone, concrete block, a wide variety of brick, tongue and groove siding, board and batten siding and lapboard siding, roof and balcony fascia. Wood sunscreens, louvers and other details appeared. Glass became an important exterior design element.

Earth tone paint colors, matching or complimenting the tones of adjacent natural materials, were the rule in Arapahoe Acres. Hawkins was particularly autocratic in the use of color in the neighborhood, personally supervising and selecting paint colors custom mixed by his painting contractor, Charles Buckley. Hawkins rule of thumb, "When in doubt, use putty," is still quoted by original owners. Coral and turquoise sometimes appeared, but only as accent colors on front doors or to emphasize architectural details.

Hawkins' interiors were related to the plans of Frank Lloyd Wright as expressed in his Usonian Style manifesto, *The Natural House*. They featured dramatic, flowing living, dining and kitchen areas with bedrooms and bathrooms grouped for privacy and quiet.

The range of custom millwork and cabinetry prefabricated in the neighborhood's carpentry shop expanded. Bedrooms included entire walls of closets with floor to ceiling sliding doors, built-in chests, and headboards; baths had wood cabinets, custom towel racks, and wall display details; dens had built-in desks and bookcases; and custom couches and sideboards were built into living and dining areas. Kitchens were designed for maximum efficiency of food preparation, service and cleanup. Many featured a pass-through to living areas, breakfast bars, and cabinets with wooden doors below and sliding doors of glass or Masonite above.

Philippine mahogany, redwood, and grasscloth covered interior walls and ceilings. Ceiling beams were exposed as an architectural detail in many homes. In others, ceilings were finished in stained plywood panels. Masonry materials which appeared on the exterior of homes moved inside as prominent fireplace features, wall, and floor surfaces. Fireplaces served as a focal point of living rooms in every home. Floors were commonly cork, hardwood, and asphalt and rubber tile. Entrance halls often featured flagstone. Recessed lighting was standard. Hawkins also designed decorative finish tile for some homes. Copper hoods on kitchen exhaust units and copper trim on the fireplaces continued to appear, a legacy of the relationship with the Revere Copper and Brass Company.

Indirect lighting emanating from flush panels integral to or concealed adjacent to their formal entrances dramatically lit house exteriors. Custom outdoor planters, walls and fences were common, frequently integral to the houses themselves. In back yards, patios with built-in furniture and barbeque units offered outdoor living and entertaining during the summer months. Screened service yards concealed hanging laundry, incinerators and trash bins from view. Front and rear entrances incorporated built-in mail and milk boxes.

Automobiles, an increasingly important part the post-war world, were accommodated by a variety of one- and two-car carports and garages, often with built-in storage units. Concrete driveways and walks were frequently combined into a single surface to maximize space for landscaping. Narrow concrete sidewalks had simple, angled curbs.

Custom street signs featured a typographic identity for Arapahoe Acres, the initial letters "A" formed by arrowheads reflecting the source of its name, the Arapaho Indian tribe. House street numbers in modern typefaces were routed on organic forms or cut out and applied to exterior finish materials.

Hawkins' life revolved around the design and construction of Arapahoe Acres. His total involvement with Arapahoe Acres was reflected by his long-term residency in the neighborhood, where he and Charlotte won the lifelong friendship of many home buyers. The Hawkins lived at 2910 South Marion Street, 2909 South Lafayette Drive, 1420 East Bates Avenue, 2921 South Franklin Street, and 2960 Lafayette, which served as their home, design studio and business office during the height of subdivision construction. Altogether, Hawkins was sole designer of approximately seventy homes in Arapahoe Acres. Clyde Mannon, formerly Hawkins' construction foreman, served as his contractor during this period, directing a loyal crew including carpenters, bricklayers, hod carriers and laborers. Cabinetmaker Bill Norlin, who had joined Hawkins as a journeyman carpenter in 1951, assumed Mannon's duties in the shop. The other trades were performed by a carefully selected and dedicated group of subcontractors.

Two houses in Arapahoe Acres were built by Hawkins from designs by national architects as Colorado display homes for *Better Homes and Gardens*. Both homes drew extensive local and national publicity to Hawkins and Arapahoe Acres. The first, "Home for All America," was constructed at 2901 South Franklin Street. It was furnished and decorated by Hal Lipstein for Davis & Shaw, a local furniture retailer. Over 3,000 visited the model home on opening day, August 29, 1954.

The "Idea Home of the Year" was built at 2921 South Franklin. Opening day attendance on August, 28, 1955, was 2,895 and total attendance was approximately 17,500. The house, designed by architects Hugh Stubbins Associates, Cambridge, Massachusetts, was built in over 100 locations in 37 states and Canada. Interior design and furnishings were provided by the major Denver department store, Daniels & Fisher. Lenny Baylinson, an Arapahoe Acres

homeowner and organist at Denver's Brown Palace Hotel, performed live music for model home visitors.

The primary landscape planning of Arapahoe Acres is believed to have been the work of Hawkins. Along the streets, sweeping lawns were punctuated by specimen trees and shrubs, planted to retain vistas of the mountains. A small landscaped island appears at the foot of South Lafayette Drive. Local landscape contractor Roy Woodman is known to have worked with Hawkins on design, as well as supplying planting materials. Hawkins designed landscaping for individual homes as well, as evidenced by his drawings for plantings at 2949 South Lafayette Drive. Other homeowners contracted directly with independent landscape firms; drawings by designer Max Capron with Marshall Nurseries survive for 1421 East Cornell Avenue.

As the neighborhood matured, Hawkins, a consummate promoter, continued to garner publicity and press for Arapahoe Acres. In a number of cases, his home plans were offered for sale. A Hawkins-designed house at 3064 South Cornell Circle was exhibited in the 1953 Denver "Parade of Homes." Hawkins' homes at 1431 East Cornell Place and 1500 East Cornell Avenue were featured in the *Denver Post's Empire Magazine*. A Hawkins' designed home at 3080 South Cornell Circle was published in *Better Homes and Gardens Home Building Ideas of 1957*. The issue featured the work of 185 residential architects and designers nationwide, organized by region. The *McCalls Garden Book* of 1967 featured a Hawkins-designed paving of exposed pebble aggregate alongside the work of renowned Denver landscape architect Saco Rienk DeBoer.

Construction in Arapahoe Acres began in 1949 and concluded in 1957. As the subdivision neared completion, Hawkins decided to utilize the lot at 2980 South Lafayette Drive as a neighborhood park and playground, an idea that Sternberg had originally proposed for eight lots on South Cornell Circle. Neighboring homeowners objected, however, and in 1955 Hawkins began construction of a home on the site.

That same year Hawkins, undoubtedly inspired by his studies of the Japanese influence on Wright's work, traveled to Japan. Upon his return, he demolished the partially completed house on South Lafayette and began again. The final version, unabashedly Japanese in style, has many design, material and landscape features unique to the neighborhood. The house at 3051 South Franklin Street, also built during this period, includes many Japanese-style details.

The Japanese style house at 2980 South Lafayette Drive was the Hawkins' residence for ten years prior to retirement and their final home in Arapahoe Acres. In exchange for the loss of the playground, the couple opened their swimming pool and adjoining pool house to neighborhood families on Saturday mornings during the summer months.

To Hawkins, residents were more than mere home buyers. They were partners in his vision of an all-encompassing community of "contemporary" homes. He was a charismatic individual who inspired great loyalty. To quote one original Arapahoe Acres owner, "Ed was a fatherly spirit who taught us a lot about design and sophisticated taste." Hawkins took his responsibilities as an educator seriously and was not shy in correcting homeowners' ill-conceived design and color choices.

As Arapahoe Acres neared completion in 1955, Edward Hawkins purchased land close to Bowles and Belleview for the development of a new project, Arapahoe Hills. Longtime business partner and contractor Clyde Mannon, now working under the name Mannon Associates, assumed the project after the completion of only three or four houses.

In 1967, Edward and Charlotte Hawkins retired to Vista, California, where Hawkins designed and built his final home in a Japanese style on the San Luis Rey golf course. For eight years, the two traveled around the world on tramp steamers. Edward B. Hawkins died in 1991 at the age of eighty-nine. Charlotte died in 1995.

This biography is a condensation of Diane Wray's Arapahoe Acres National Register nomination.

Reference Material

Site Files Database, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society, Denver.

Wray, Diane. "Arapahoe Acres," National Register of Historic Places registration form, February 28, 1998.

Revised: September 16, 2006